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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 July 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Soviet Compliance in Arms Limitations

1. If the Soviets were to conclude an agreement with the United States imposing limitations on deployment of strategic arms, we believe that they would be impelled by their own self-interest to observe its provisions. They would doubtless take advantage of any freedoms the agreement left them to pursue R&D programs and make qualitative improvements in existing weapons systems. But we think that they would consider the risks involved in significant violation as unacceptably high, far offsetting any advantages to be gained. They are aware -- at least in general terms -- of the scope of US capabilities to detect violations. They know they would have to contend both with the international opprobrium which would accompany exposure and with the expanded arms program which the United States presumably would thereupon undertake.

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2. The very reasons which had in the first place led the Soviets to negotiate the limitation of arms would operate to deter them from violating an agreement, once it had been reached. To the extent that they had been motivated by the desire to limit military costs and free resources for other purposes, they would continue to want to avoid provoking, and having to carry the expense of, a renewed arms race. To the extent that they had decided they were approaching and could maintain an acceptable balance in their strategic relationship with the United States, they would want to avoid risking that balance. To the extent that they had come to fear that a continued arms race would significantly increase the danger to Soviet survival in the event of hostilities, they would be still more anxious to restrain the growth in strategic weapons.

3. A Soviet concealment and deception program designed to evade US detection of violations would be costly and of dubious value. The Soviets have, up to now, experimented with such measures only on a very limited scale. Beyond this, there would be important uncertainties that the Soviets would have to take into account -

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[REDACTED] Even efforts at concealment might be identified by the United States as such, thus arousing suspicion. Moreover, the Soviets must always be concerned over the possibility of a leak or a defection. In sum, even though the Soviets went to great and expensive lengths, they probably could not have sufficient assurance that violations of an agreement would long go undetected.

4. In order to accept all these costs and risks of an attempted evasion of the agreement, the Soviet leaders would need to have some powerful motivation. It is difficult to see what this might be. It seems clear to us that they would recognize that secret additions to their forces would not provide any meaningful margin of military advantage. And such a move would not provide them with greater political leverage, perhaps the contrary.

5. It is possible that the Soviets, after having signed an agreement, might eventually conclude that their interests were no longer consistent with its terms. This might happen, for instance, after some sweeping change in the leadership of the Soviet government. But even in such event, we think that the USSR would be more likely to abrogate the accord openly

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than to try to cheat on its provisions. The Soviets would probably judge that open abrogation would incur less political liabilities than would the exposure of deliberate violation. And they would doubtless seek to blame their action on some US move which they claimed was not consonant with the agreement.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



ABBOT SMITH
Chairman

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